DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 381 407 SO 023 444

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TITLE Dilemmas and Solutions in Selection and Preparation of Children's Art for International Exhibitions.
PUB DATE 86
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Art Education Association Conference, (New Orleans, LA, April 4-8, 1986); and the EXPO Conference (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, July 1-4, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Art Education; Childrens Art; Elementary Secondary Education; *Exhibits; Guidelines; International Cooperation; International Educational Exchange
IDENTIFIERS *United States Society for Education Through Art

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the director of The United States Society for Education through Art (USSEA) child art exhibitions presents some issues for future exhibition promoters to consider. A clear, concise list of qualifications and information, should be provided when requesting public submissions of work. Information required may include: name of country; child's age; theme; kinds of media acceptable; size limitations; limit to number of pieces; personal information about the artist; art teacher; school; and deadline. Input from host countries should be considered when selecting an exhibition theme. This theme should be announced early in the process. Establishing U.S. deadlines is an important consideration. Avoid summer deadlines and expect late submissions. Allow only one person or two co-worker individuals to organize the reception and preparation of student work for display. Permissions, publicity arrangements, and follow-up news releases require lengthy preparation and liberal timelines. Standardization of work preparation and mailing procedures should be established. Problematic areas that require future attention include "What constitutes 'Top Quality,'" and "What happens to the work after its submission." (MM)

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Dilemmas and Solutions in Selection and Preparation of Children's Art for International Exhibitions

By

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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"Dilemmas and Solutions in Selection and Preparation of Children's Art for International Exhibitions"

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For anyone attending the INSEA World Congresses and conferences, one of the most lively and refreshing stepping stones from the lectures and research presentations on art education to the reality of the world of child art is the link made by the children's art exhibitions sent from each member country who cares to submit one. As the Director of three recent USSEA child art exhibitions for international events since 1981, I have identified some recurring problems found within the cycle from soliciting the art work to the final exhibition. Some of these dilemmas and solutions will be discussed here.

One of the first steps in the soliciting process is developing the statement to be used in asking the public to submit art work to the exhibition. In writing this statement there are certain basic pieces of information that are requested. Currently USSEA is listing the following qualifications and information needed for art work submitted to be used in exhibitions for international congresses.

1. country
2. ages defined as "child art"
3. theme, if any
4. kinds of media acceptable
5. size limit limitations
6. how work should be presented and finished
7. limit to number of pieces (if any)
8. who will own the exhibition if work is accepted
9. who will be responsible for the art work
10. personal information about the artist, name, age, sex, address, year completed, area of country, address
11. name of work and media
12. art teacher, school, school address

13. a statement about the work if applicable
14. where the art work should be sent
15. deadline
16. who will be responsible for the art work and what will happen to it when the exhibition is over
17. how work will be returned (or if it is to be)
18. how work received, but not selected will be shipped back to sender, and who will pay the postage

The above list has been required for the two USSEA exhibitions I have organized for the World Congresses in Rio de Janeiro and Hamburg, and was also used for the one in Rotterdam in 1981. It is possible maybe to create some better standardized form which could be used by all the countries participating in the exhibitions and that would make the continuity and the use of the art work for research and later exhibitions better and more accessible. At least an INSEA task force might like to contribute some additional and better ideas for future forms and perhaps this group here could start it.

Another real problem is that the announcement of the theme of the World Congresses usually comes quite late and it holds back sending out flyers and soliciting art work for many months. It also would be nice to get some more information from the hosts countries as to what they would like to see exhibited and if they have any specific requirements and interests beyond an interpretation of a theme. Often the theme announcement has come so late that it has held up the publicity a year and a half or more between the three year conference cycle of the INSEA international congresses.

Establishing American deadlines to receive art work have proven an interesting dilemma since the art teachers tend to put off sending work until the last moment. A late Spring deadline gets few responses through the summer, while I have found that one placed just after Christmas seems to work out the best. To have a deadline in the summer is futile since most schools are not in session and no-one pays any attention to it. Also to be considered are that magazines and newsletters sent to educators are not published or read in the summer months.

This was one of the problems I had with the collecting of child art for the "Celebration '86 International Young Art Exhibition" for this Vancouver conference. I was notified about the exhibit in the month of May, '85 and the work was to arrive to me by October, '85. Luckily the deadline was extended to December, or USSEA would have had little work to submit.

Having one member receive and prepare the children's art work for the three exhibitions I have worked on, I believe to be the best solution to organizing the work. Although I have had co-directors and assistants, one person simply has to take the responsibility to do the major work. The USSEA membership is so scattered around the United States it is impossible to work quickly and efficiently with a group of people. The best solution is to have someone assist you who could step in in case of an emergency and who will be the Director of the next exhibition. Two people who lived in the same area, however could share the responsibilities easily. Since there are usually several child art exhibits going on at the same time, there is plenty of opportunity for anyone interested to take on a responsibility of organizing a show; therefore it does not look like one person is taking over all the child art exhibitions at one time.

My own interests in doing this kind of work for several exhibitions is due to my having run art galleries and exhibitions spaces and particularly enjoying preparing work for an exhibition and working through the cycle. I have used my college students as assistants and have had them prepare the work, mat it, and finally hang the show in a university gallery before shipping it overseas. This gives them the opportunity to view current children's art, see how a show is put together, learn something about INSEA, and participate in a real art education event. While the show is on exhibit, I have had an opening for local art teachers and allowed the community to view it. I have also used the art work on occasion in department displays.

This activity has got me involved in the publicity aspect of the exhibition. After the initial statement to solicit the art work has been prepared, it must be first approved by the USSEA President and anybody else

working on the project. Unfortunately, this can take months of time. When approved, the statement must be sent to the media and several months can elapse before it is published. Again one can easily see why it takes every bit of the three years of time between international congresses to prepare the next exhibition. It is easy to see how twelve months can pass after the statement has been written by the Exhibition Director and the piece actually appears in the magazines and newsletters. It also takes at least two months for School Arts, Arts and Activities and the NAEA Newsletter to publish the material from the time that they receive it.

The time problem above described is why I chose to put this presentation together. It is possible solutions can be found to cut down on the amount of time to get publicity out so that more art teachers will be able to send art work and contribute. I have already given the statement soliciting art work to the '87 Hamburg exhibit to each NAEA State newsletter editor. Hopefully it will reach some new art teachers by the Fall who will find work to contribute.

It is also necessary to develop a news release after an exhibition has been finished. This includes describing the kind of exhibition, who has been selected to exhibit, who juried the exhibition, where it will be shown, and the way the art work will be used overseas. It is a good chance to publicize USSEA and INSEA. This is sent to the art teachers who have submitted work, each artist who has a piece accepted, the university information service of the Director of the exhibit, local media if the work is to be displayed, and to the USSEA newsletter editor.

Along with the news release, the artists who have work accepted receive a certificate of participation in the exhibition. Since I am a graphic designer, I have designed a certificate which also is used on the mat as a label, and includes the information requested by USSEA for the exhibit and the USSEA logo.

A standardized way of preparing the art work for the American international art exhibitions was suggested by Al Hurwitz who has done many of these shows. Each piece is attached to a piece of 19" x 24" white good quality hundred pound drawing paper. This size is easily boxed and sent overseas meeting the mailing specifications. Larger pieces can be sent in mailing rolls. The local mail services usually give very vague instructions about specifications for mailing this kind of art work overseas. Each time I have done this I have first received the wrong instructions and have had to repack my art work. It is suggested that one be very careful to meet the mailing regulations and get the correct information from the post office with great care.

Taking on the responsibility of selecting the art work which will become part of the exhibit representing the USSEA organization assumes the problem of interpreting what the organization would like to see representing them. The statement about what kind of work will be included is found on the initial news release. For the two World Congresses I have worked on, this states "the exhibition will include only work of top quality which represents the wide student populations represented by USSEA and reflects the theme of the World Congress." "Top quality" leaves a lot to be desired in suggesting information about how to jury a show. Most work I have received is like the following pieces which was an envelope with about forty drawings from elementary school children of airplanes done in pencil on manila drawing paper (all neatly folded). It is necessary to personally ask and recruit art teachers one knows who will send quality work to fill out what is sent by the general media recruitment.

The USSEA membership, although willing verbally to send pieces of work and contact teachers they know who might like to, often falls short of actually sending art work by the time the deadline comes. Perhaps it is necessary to review strategies on how to get membership to locate and submit art work so the kind of work exhibited will be of a higher caliber. About ninety pieces of art work in general make up an exhibition for an international congress and in order to select this much, one really has to hunt around for child art

that is good and varied enough to be representative of what students in the K - 12 grades are doing in the United States.

I especially experienced the problem of "quality" when I took the twelve pieces I had selected for the "Expo '86" exhibition to Vancouver, B.C. in January. I had a chance to view the kind of quality of excellence submitted by other INSEA countries to be placed in the exhibition. I felt our contributions did not necessarily come up to the quality of many of the other countries. A close observation though of where the work was coming from in the countries revealed that the art work was sometimes coming from the same teacher or the same students. It was carefully selected to be the "very best." Our emphasis is to take the best work that is submitted and have it represent different teachers in different parts of the United States. We are not trying for a "Scholastic Awards" kind of exhibit. This means that our overall exhibition is often not the very best. This whole issue might be looked at by some future directors of art exhibits for our organization.

Another vague, unclear area of the exhibitions is what happens to the work after it is exhibited. The work has become the property of USSEA. So far, I have observed that the cost of packing and returning it to the United States from a foreign country at an international conference has been so considerable, that it appears easier to give the work away to people attending the conferences. Is this a good solution?

Since there are so many exhibitions and collections that the USSEA membership will be asked to contribute to in the future, I have attempted to outline here some basic issues which can possibly be used by a task force from the group and others who might meet at this conference. There is no pay for doing these kinds of jobs, but personally I have received many rewards and much enjoyment from my participation in these child art exhibits over the years.

Anne Gregory